

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 4537

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: PCP - MID-TERM PROSPECTS

REF: LISBON 4495

SUMMARY: PORTUGUESE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCP) EMERGED IN WAKE OF APRIL 1974 REVOLUTION WITH CERTAIN KEY ADVANTAGES. EARLY EVENTS, COMBINED WITH PARTY'S OWN TACTICS, LED TO RAPID EXPANSION OF ITS POWER BASE. ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY, HOWEVER, FORCES SET IN MOTION BY CONTRADICTIONS WITHIN PARTY'S MAKEUP SET STAGE FOR LATER CONTRACTION OF THAT BASE. PARTY'S EFFORT TO IDENTIFY ITSELF TO MAXIMUM WITH INSTITUTION AND PERSONALITIES OF ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM) HAS BROUGHT IT KEY TACTICAL VICTORIES. IT HAS ALSO LEFT PARTY DANGEROUSLY EXPOSED, WITH NO ATTRACTIVE OR VIABLE ALTERNATIVES SHOULD AFM ITSELF COLLAPSE OR WITHDRAW FROM SCENE. ALTHOUGH STILL A MAJOR POWER CENTER AND LIKELY TO REMAIN SO, THE PCP IS COMING UNDER ATTACK FROM ALL SIDES AND ITS POSITION HAS BEEN SUB-
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STANTIALY DIMINISHED SINCE ITS HEYDAY FOLLOWING APRIL 25,

1974. END SUMMARY.

1. POST-REVOLUTION ADVANTAGES. PCP EMERGED ON APRIL 26, 1974 WITH FUNCTIONING, NATIONALLY ORGANIZED APPARATUS MANNED BY PROVEN, EXPERIENCED, DEDICATED CADRE PREPARED TO ACCEPT AND CARRY OUT INSTRUCTIONS FROM RECOGNIZED PARTY LEADERSHIP. PARTY HAD NO RIVALS. PARTY ENJOYED ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF HAVING LED LONG STRUGGLE AGAINST DEPOSED REGIME, A STRUGGLE THAT HAD EARNED IT MARTYRDOM AND CLAIM TO MORAL LEADERSHIP WHICH NO OTHER GROUP EXTANT COULD MATCH. IN THIS INITIAL ERA OF GOOD FEELING PCP OFFERED ATTRACTIVE POLE AROUND WHICH MANY NEWLY-DISCOVERED "ANTI-FASCISTS" COULD AND DID RALLY, EITHER OUT OF NAIVETE OR FOR REASONS OF CONVENIENCE. CRITICIZING PARTY DIRECTLY WAS POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE.

2. AUGMENTING THE ADVANTAGES. PCP'S UNHESITATING AND PUBLIC PROCLAMATION ACCEPTING AFM'S COUP AND LEGITIMACY OF AFM ROLE IN GOVERNING POST-COUP PORTUGAL EARNED IT MILITARY'S CONFIDENCE AND FULL RESPECTABILITY. IT ALSO EARNED IT TWO LABOR-RELATED CABINET POSITIONS IN FIRST PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT (PG) SET UP UNDER PRESIDENT SPINOLA. AS INDICATED BY CHOICE OF CABINET SLOTS, PG AUTHORITIES LOOKED TO PCP TO MAINTAIN TIGHT CHECK ON POTENTIALLY RESTIVE PORTUGUESE WORKERS. IN EFFECT, PG'S NON-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS VOLUNTARILY ABANDONED LABOR TO PCP IN EXCHANGE FOR PROMISE OF LABOR PEACE. THIS COMBINATION OF NAIVETE AND SMUGNESS BY PCP'S "LIBERAL" PG PARTNERS, CONFIDENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO CONTROL PARTY AND USE IT TO OWN PURPOSES, WAS CONTRIBUTING ELEMENT IN LIBERALS' DEFEAT DURING NEW REGIME'S FIRST MAJOR POLITICAL CRISIS--THE JULY 1974 SPINOLA-PALMA CARLOS ATTEMPTED PALACE COUP AGAINST AFM COORDINATING COMMITTEE. PCP SOLIDLY SUPPORTED AFM. AS AFM'S POWER INCREASED IN SECOND PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, SO DID PCP'S. IN MEANTIME PCP ALSO INSTALLED ITSELF IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL BODIES THROUGHOUT PORTUGAL. ACTING UNDER COVER OF PORTUGUESE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (MDP/CDE), PARTY MANAGED TO EXPEL "FASCISTS" AND SUBSTITUTE ITS OWN PEOPLE WITHOUT, AT SAME TIME, MAKING TOO OBVIOUS FACT OF ITS TAKEOVER. IN FOURTH MAJOR SECTOR, PRESS, PARTY ACTIVISTS WORKED CLOSELY WITH OTHER "PROGRESSIVE" FORCES TO PURGE "FASCISTS" AND PLACE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF NEWSPAPERS IN HANDS

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OF EMPLOYEES RATHER THAN MANAGEMENT OR OWNERS.

3. CONTRADICTIONS EMERGE. HOWEVER, EVEN AS ABOVE PROCESS EXPANDING PARTY'S POWER BASE WAS IN MOTION, CONTRADICTIONS INHERENT IN PARTY'S CHARACTER AND POLICIES WERE AT WORK TO OPPOSITE EFFECT. TWO GENERATIONS OF CLANDESTINITY LEFT MIXED HERITAGE. FULFILLING ITS ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING LABOR PEACE, I.E. AVOIDING OR BREAKING STRIKES,

PCP REVEALED HABITS OF SECRECY, RIGIDITY, INTRANSIGENCE, AND RUTHLESSNESS. VICIOUS AND DECITFUL MANNER IN WHICH PARTY UNDERMINED SERIES OF STRIKES IT WAS UNABLE TO PREVENT DURING PERIOD OF FIRST TWO PRIVISIONAL GOVERNMENTS (CTT, MATOSINHOS FISHERMEN, TAP, LISBON TRANSPORT AND BREAD WORKERS) REVEALED PARTY'S TRU NATURE AND PROVIDED IMMEDIATE BENEFIT TO FAR LEFT. PCP'S "ANTI-STRIKE" REPUTATION ESTRANGED YOUTHFUL ACTIVISTS, WHO FOUND IDEOLOGICAL HAVEN IN GROUPS TO PCP'S LEFT. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY PCP ANTI-STRIKE POLICIES AND TACTICS ALIENATED WORKERS THEMSELVES, GIVING FAR LEFT AND PS OPPORTUNITY TO COMPETE WITH PARTY FOR LEADERSHIP OF SEGMENTS OF LABOR MOVEMENT. WHILE PCP COMMITTED ITSELF TO SUPPORTING AFM AT EVERY TURN, IT FOLLOWED OPPOSITE POLICY RESPECT TO ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL FORCES. AS TIME PASSED PCP BECAME INCREASINGLY LESS TACTFUL IN ITS REFERENCES TO CDS, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, PPD, AND ULTIMATELY EVEN SOCIALISTS. CONFLICT OVER IMPOSITION OF UNITARY LABOR MOVEMENT, IN WHICH PCP PULLED OUT ALL STOPS TO GET ITS WAY, MARKED DEFINITIVE END TO PERIOD OF "GOOD FEELING." PARTY'S RHETORIC SHIFTED FROM EMPHASIZING BROAD COALITION OF FORCES NEEDED TO RECONSTRUCT PORTUGAL TO DEFINING ENEMIES OF REVOLUTION. BY WORD AND ACTION, PARTY GRADUALLY DISABUSED PEOPLE OF IDEA THAT IT WAS NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER DEMOCRATIC FORCES, THAT IT GENUINELY WISHED TO REPRESENT ALL ELEMENTS IN PORTUGUESE SOCIETY.

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4. REAPING THE CONSEQUENCES. PCP'S ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY ITSELF WITH AFM SUCCEEDED. IN SHORT RUN THIS SUCCESS HAS GIVEN PARTY GRATIFYING RESULTS, TO POINT WHERE IT NOW IS ONLY MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE WITH WHICH AFM MAINTAINS WORKING RELATIONSHIP. IF AFM COULD PROVE ITSELF CAPABLE OF HANDLING PORTUGAL'S PROBLEMS, PCP WOULD DOMINATE SCENE TO EXCLUSION OF ALL RIVALS. SINCE TO CONTRARY AFM HAS PRESENTED PICTURE OF INDECISIVENESS, INCOMPETENCE, AND INEFFECTIVENESS, PCP'S OVERIDENTIFICATION WITH IT IS POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS. IF, FOR AFM, CONSTRUCTING SOCIALISM IN PORTUGAL IS UNTHINKABLE WITHOUT PCP, FOR PCP POLITICAL FUTURE IS UNTHINKABLE SHOULD THERE NO LONGER BE AN AFM. FOR THAT MATTER NOT ALL MEMBERS OF AFM NOW HOLD TO VIEW THAT PCP'S ROLE IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS OF REVOLUTION. ONE YEAR IN POWER HAS LEFT SOME AFM MEMBERS MORE WORLDLY AND LESS INCLINED TO ACCEPT PCP FAWNING WITHOUT SUSPICION. IN MEANTIME PCP HAS PERFORMED FOR ITS DEMOCRATIC RIVALS A TASK THEY COULD NOT HAVE ACCOMPLISHED ON THEIR OWN--FORGING TEMPORARY COHESIVENESS IN FACE OF COMMONLY PERCEIVED THREAT THAT EXTENDS FROM SOCIALISTS AND SOME ELEMENTS ON FAR
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LEFT TO CATHOLICS AND CDS. LOCKED INTO POSITION, PCP HAS NO ROOM LEFT IN WHICH TO MANEUVER. IT MIGHT WISH TO TAKE HARD LINE, USING ITS CURRENT POSITION WITH AFM, IN UNIONS, AND PRESS TO SIEZE TOTAL CONTROL OF COUNTRY. HOWEVER, ITS HOLD ON ALL THREE IS INCOMPLETE, AND CURRENT CRISIS OF AUTHORITY MAKES QUESTION OF "CONTROL" OF PORTUGAL ACADEMIC AT THIS POINT. SECOND OPTION, FOLLOWING LIBERAL PATH CHOSEN BY ITALIAN COMMUNISTS, IS VIRTUALLY EXCLUDED BY VIRTUE OF NUMEROUS BRIDGES PCP HAS BURNED IN ITS RELATIONS WITH NON-COMMUNIST PARTIES. PCP'S SOLE VIABLE ROAD TO POWER THEREFORE LIES IN MAINTENANCE OF STATUS QUO, TIED INTO ALLIANCE WITH AFM.

5. BOTH THE POLISH AND ROMANIAN AMBASSADORS HERE HAVE CONFIRMED TO US THAT PCP HAS BEEN LOSING SUPPORT IN POPULATION AND AFM DUE TO ITS RIGIDITY (REFTEL).

6. PROSPECTS. IN LIGHT LAST 15 MONTHS' DEVELOPMENTS MORE CHANGES AHEAD ARE LIKELY TO INCLUDE:

A. MORE PHYSICAL ATTACKS AGAINST PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY OF PCP AND FELLOW-TRAVELING PARTIES THROUGHOUT NORTHERN AND CENTRAL PORTUGAL AND IN ATLANTIC ISLANDS. TO DATE THE PCP WEEKLY AVANTE HAS ACKNOWLEDGED OVER 50 CASES OF ATTACKS ON COMMUNISTS AND PARTY INSTALLATION;

B. CONTINUING ATTRITION, PARTICULARLY IN LISBON, FROM

PARTY'S FLANKS TO FAR LEFT GROUPS AND PS;

C. INCREASINGLY PRECARIOUS PCP DOMINANCE OF LABOR UNIONS;

D. MORE AND MORE AFM IS COMING TO VIEW PCP AS RIVAL POWER CENTER RATHER THAN RELIABLE ALLY. RECENT FAILURE OF COMMUNIST-INSPIRED ATTEMPTS TO OUST COMMANDER OF COMANDO REGIMENT AND SIMILAR EVENTS IN OTHER MILITARY UNITS SHOW HOW ACUTE THE CONFLICT HAS ALREADY BECOME.

7. CONCLUSIONS: ALTHOUGH THE PCP REMAINS ONE OF PORTUGAL'S PRINCIPAL POWER CENTERS, ITS INFLUENCE AND STRENGTH HAVE DECLINED NOTICEABLY RECENTLY AND IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE DOING SO UNLESS THE PARTY CAN ENGINEER ANOTHER LURCH TO THE LEFT OF THE SEPT. 28 OR MARCH 11 TYPE. IN LONG RUN, PCP'S WEAK SHOWING IN THE ELECTION IS GOING TO BE INCREASINGLY MORE RELIABLE INDICATOR OF ITS ACTUAL POWER THAN THE DECLINING VALUE OF ITS COHESIVENESS, DISCIPLINE, AND PRE-APRIL 25 MORAL SUPERIORITY. SOCIALISTS CLAIM THAT MOST RECENT POLLS SHOW PCP SUPPORT HAVING
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DECLINED TO UNDER 10 PERCENT.

8. HOWEVER, LEADERSHIP ELITES HERE, INCLUDING AFM, PPD, AND PS STILL HAVE EXAGGERATED IMPRESSION OF COMMUNIST STRENGTH AND ARE AFRAID TO TACKLE PCP HEAD ON FOR FEAR THAT COMMUNISTS THROUGH POWER IN UNIONS AND BUREAUCRACY CAN SHUT DOWN COUNTRY.
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